1465

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

REVIEW

OF THE

HOME DEPARTMENT

OF THE

WOMAN'S BOARD OF MISSIONS.

BY MISS A. B. CHILD.

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ONE morning nearly twenty-six years ago an earnest Christian woman was sitting in a bright, sunny room at the top of her house,—she was "a house-top saint" indeed,—reading a missionary magazine. She had read many such, and her heart had burned within her at the wrongs of heathendom; but never as now had she been impressed with her personal duty to heathen women. She tried to do away with the impression in vain. The "still small voice" in her heart then roused has never since been silent. After days and weeks of indecision she yielded to the call of her Lord, and went forth to do his bidding.

At about the same time, and in the same city, another Christian woman went one morning to a woman's missionary meeting, under the auspices of the Woman's Union Missionary Society. She was neither young, nor beautiful, nor intellectual. She was a plain, simple-hearted little woman; but she was ever ready to do her Master's errands. The meeting, also, was neither large nor famous. Doubtless the leaders went to it with much trembling and sinking of the heart, as women have so often gone to missionary meetings since that time. But our friend's heart was aroused, and she carried a live coal from the little gathering to the sister with whom she lived. The sister was vigorous, intellectual, executive, and with her the impression grew day by day that there should be more definite, organ-

ized effort for the women and children in heathen lands. Mutual friends soon brought these two women together (Mrs. Albert Bowker, our first President, and Mrs. Homer Bartlett, our first Treasurer), and through their instrumentality our Woman's Board was formed. The first causes then were very simple,—a missionary magazine and a missionary meeting,—but they had the blessing of God.

The story of subsequent efforts is familiar to all: the small but constantly-increasing circle of interested women; the days and weeks of careful planning; the frequent meetings for prayer, where the Spirit's presence was so often manifest; the many rebuffs from clergymen and laymen who were full of doubt as to the wisdom of the movement; the applications for encouragement to denominational Boards, only to be met with the remark, "I wish such a society could be formed, but it does not seem practical; it would be a failure."

The first word of real approbation came from the Rev. Dr. N. G. Clark, then Junior Foreign Secretary of the American Board, who has remained an unfailing friend from that hour to the present. To his fostering care in the early days, his defense of our right to existence, his private encouragement and public praise, and above all to his confidence in us, we owe more than we can tell.

At last, after eight months of effort, all things were ready, and a meeting for organization was

called the first Tuesday in January, 1868, in Freeman Place Chapel. Forty women were present. Forty women to start a society to carry the gospel to fifty million of women and children! But the call seemed unmistakable. "For there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."

At its organization three aims were set before the Board:—

1. By extra funds, efforts, and prayers to cooperate with the American Board in its several departments of labor for the benefit of women and children in heathen lands.

2. To disseminate missionary intelligence and increase a missionary spirit among women at home.

3. To train children to interest and participation in the work.

Shall we consider for a few moments how far these three aims have been accomplished.

ORGANIZATIONS.

Since the American Board had an entrance into the churches in the usual way, it seemed best to organize local auxiliary societies among women. Efforts to do this met with a ready response, and at the close of the third year the list numbered one hundred and forty-six Auxiliaries and fifty-nine Mission Circles among children. These numbers were more than doubled at the end of the fifth year, and again doubled at the end of the first decade. Since then they

have increased more gradually, till now we number twenty-three Branches, having under their care more than seventeen hundred organizations in more than half the churches in our territory, and having a membership estimated at 35,000, out of about 220,000 female church members.

It was soon evident that Auxiliaries from a distance needed to be gathered around covenient centers, having the stimulus of close contact with other societies, and the advantages of regularly appointed officers, who knew the churches,—their capabilities and their needs. For this purpose the idea of Branch societies was conceived, each comprising not less than twenty Auxiliaries and Mission Circles. The Philadelphia Branch was the first one organized, in 1871, and others followed in quick succession, till we now have twenty-three Branches covering all our territory: one Branch in each of the States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island and New York, one comprised of the Congregational churches of the New Jersey Association, which includes Pennsylvania; three in Connecticut, and fourteen in Massachusetts.

This complete organization—wheels within wheels—has been of inestimable value in our work. The officers of Branches have almost without exception proved themselves marvelously adapted to their position; alert, persistent, tactful, prayerful and earnest, they have labored in season and out of season to accomplish the aim set before us. All honor is due also to the

officers and members of local Auxiliaries, where, after all, the personal, hand-to-hand work of the Board has been done. Living creatures within the wheels these workers have been, with hearts warm and palpitating with love for Christ and for his kingdom on the earth. To them is due the success of our Board. "When those went these went; when those stood these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels."

The shadows in these organizations have been few. Some societies have died, for want of a little more courage in their members; others have disbanded, from force of circumstances; and some churches still hold aloof, and refuse us their aid and sympathy. The question of the relation of our auxiliaries to other benevolent societies caused much discussion at one time, but was finally amicably settled. But in general their story has been one of long, steady, successful effort.

Before we leave this part of our subject we may be allowed a brief tribute to the individual workers. Rare women they have been—intellectual, broad-minded, enthusiastic in their love for foreign missions—the very best in all the churches. No one who has often attended our meetings could fail to be impressed with the *personnel* of those in attendance, as well as of the leaders. Just here we wish to express our obligation to Mt. Holyoke Seminary. Of late years we

have owed much to graduates of other institutions; but in the early days, over and over again the one or two women found in a church to enter into immediate sympathy with us, proved to be a graduate of Mt. Holyoke. So Mary Lyon lives again in her daughters, zealous laborers for the cause she loved so well.

No record of our Board could be made without reference to our first President, our present Honorary President, Mrs. Albert Bowker. She took up the work in her prime, and brought to it the rare combination of wealth, leisure, great intellectual and executive ability, and deep and thorough consecration. At the present time hardly a month passes that we do not recognize the wisdom of her far-sighted planning, and her wonderful perception of the needs of the future. For twenty years she gave herself heart and soul to the work. No storm was furious enough to keep her from her appointments at the Board Rooms. Her house, in its abounding hospitality, was always open to friends of the cause, and her carriage was in constant use to promote its interest. No point was too small to enlist her utmost pains to make it exactly what it should be, and no undertaking was too large for her to attempt, if convinced of its need; while over and around all that she did was her prayerful spirit,—a constant waiting on God for guidance and blessing. Not a step was taken, not a meeting held, not a printed page sent out, not an appropriation of money made, without earnest, per-

sistent prayer. We rejoice that we still occasionally have her presence with us, although she usually sits apart from us in her home, waiting serene and quiet in the peaceful border lands. One eminently fitted to stand by her side was our first Treasurer, Mrs. Homer Bartlett. Brilliant, cultivated, wise, executive, her inspiring touch was felt in every department of the Board during the five years before she was called from earth.

Time forbids extended mention of the many who have rendered invaluable service as officers of the Board. Of the twenty-eight whose names appear in the first list of officers, nine are still living: the President, three Vice Presidents, two Secretaries, and three Directors. We cannot forbear to mention the names of those who have labored so heartily with us, but who, among the great cloud of witnesses, are invisibly present with us to-day. They are: seventeen Vice Presidents,—Mrs. Rufus Anderson, Mrs. S. B. Treat, Mrs. Richard Borden, Mrs. Gyles Merrill, Mrs. Chas. Stoddard, Mrs. John B. Page, Mrs. Luther Daniels, of the Vermont Branch; Mrs. Chas. Washburn, of Worcester; Mrs. Edward Robie, of the New Hampshire Branch; Mrs. Ray Palmer, of the Philadelphia Branch; Mrs. Wm. J. King, and Mrs. A. D. Lockwood, of the Rhode Island Branch; Mrs. Wm. Thompson, of the Hartford Branch; Mrs. M. M. Chapin, of the Norfolk and Pilgrim Branch; Mrs. L. F. Warner, of the Suffolk Branch; Mrs. S. D. Stoddard, of the Hampshire Branch; Mrs. Burdett Hart, of the New

Haven Branch; one Secretary, Mrs. George Gould,—one of the fairest ornaments of the early assemblages and one of the Board's most efficient helpers: three Treasurers, Mrs. Homer Bartlett, of whom we have spoken, Mrs. B. E. Bates whose inspiring presence, clear judgment, and willing, devoted service made her a tower of strength; Miss Emma Carruth, who came to us in her fresh young womanhood, whose zeal and devotion were unbounded, and whose love for the work was intense; nine Directors,—Mrs. Giles Pease, Mrs. Charles Scudder, Mrs. Daniel Safford, Mrs. Linus Child, Mrs. J. G. L. Coit, Mrs. J. S. Ambrose, Mrs. Michael Simpson, Mrs. Wm. S. Houghton, Mrs. Paul A. Chadbourne. Blessed and honored names they are: may ours be worthy to stand beside them.

THE TREASURY.

Our treasury during the twenty-five years, the object of much anxiety, has been a satisfaction and delight as well. The sum of $5,033.13 contributed the first year was more than doubled in 1869, and trebled in 1870. Since that time the gain in contributions has been steady, although at the end of each seven years, 1878, 1885 and 1892, there has been a falling off of a few thousands. It would seem that our constituency stopped to take breath and then pressed on again, as in each case the lost ground was more than regained in the third year, and there was steady increase until the end of another seven years.

Legacies have fluctuated more or less each year, the largest amount received in any one year being over $31,000 for 1892. The total amount of receipts for the twenty-five years has been $2,041,925.86. During the first year we assumed the support of seven missionaries and eleven Bible women, commencing the payment of their salaries at the beginning of the following year. The foreign work gradually increased, till for ten years, with the Board of the Interior and the Pacific, we have provided for all the single ladies and a number of married ladies, the girls' boarding and day schools, and portions of mixed schools, and all the Bible women. Our own Board has sent out 213 missionaries, paying outfit and traveling expenses, since 1872; equipped and supported thirty-nine boarding-schools, providing buildings for twenty-six, at a cost of from fifteen hundred to sixteen thousand dollars each, and for the Constantinople Home ninety-eight thousand. We have also supported in whole or in part about 500 different day schools and nearly as many Bible women, with medical and miscellaneous work amounting to thousands of dollars. It is with the deepest gratitude that we can say that with close and careful planning, and some elasticity as to the time of payments, we have never been obliged to give up any work undertaken, nor of late years to refuse any that was asked as legitimately belonging to us, for want of money. Our faith in our constituency has never been

disappointed. The amount of dollars and cents contributed does not tell the whole story of our treasury. We think it is safe to say that not a dollar has been contributed without special thought and prayer, either by the giver or the collector, and the gifts bearing the sweet incense of special consecration, of self-denial, of thank offering, of memorial, known and unknown, would afford a long and touching story.

The second aim proposed at our organization, was to disseminate missionary intelligence and increase a missionary spirit among Christian women at home. This has been done principally through the *meetings* of the different organizations and the *printed page*.

MEETINGS.

The present number of meetings of Board and Branch, Auxiliary and Mission Circle, in our 1,700 organizations, would number at a small average at least twelve thousand each year; the aggregate for the twenty-five years being hundreds of thousands. The time and thought given to these gatherings cannot be computed. An interesting feature has been the gradual development of power in conducting them. Timid, low-voiced women have acquired ease and self-possesion; parliamentary rules have been studied and carefully followed, and the smaller accessories that mean so much have been watched and guarded. No mention of these meetings is com-

plete without a tribute of gratitude to our missionaries. Returning to this country worn and ill, they have yet entered most heartily into the needs of the home field and have gone here and there among the churches interesting, inspiring, and winning many for the cause who could be reached in no other way.

What has been accomplished in these meetings? In every one information has been given as to foreign missions, and prayer offered for their success. Have they ever been dull and lifeless? Sometimes. In the large majority, however, there has been life and warmth, and the wonderful news from other lands has kindled many a fire which burns to-day with steady light, while many a great congregation has been thrilled through and through by the story of the Gospel's marvelous power in every land. Above all, we may be sure that, whether recognized or not our Lord Jesus Christ has been present at every meeting, and we believe that the souls who, in these heavenly places, have been roused, cheered, comforted, lifted to a higher plane of living, and stimulated to better service, may be numbered by the hundred.

LITERATURE.

A second means of disseminating intelligence has been through missionary literature. Soon after the Board was formed it became evident that manuscript letters could not meet the demand

for information. Occasional circulars also proved inadequate, and it was decided to undertake a quarterly periodical. Much thought and prayer was given to the subject. The first number was issued in March, 1869, without knowing where a line of material was to be secured for the next number, without an editor, or the assurance of a single subscriber. Its name, Life and Light for Heathen Women, afterward changed to Life and Light for Woman, was the suggestion of Dr. N. G. Clark. The first numbers were edited by the President, and sent out by the Treasurer from her own parlor. Subscriptions came in rapidly, and many expressions of commendation were received. It remained a quarterly of thirty-six pages, from four to eight pages being given to children's matter, till 1872, when it was changed to a monthly of thirty-two pages. Twelve of these pages were under the care of the Board of the Interior. In 1876 the eight pages of children's matter was taken out, leaving the space for other articles. In 1879 four more pages were added for a Young People's Department, and in 1880, still another four for a Department of the Pacific, making forty in all. In 1889 the magazine was again enlarged to its present form, containing forty-eight larger-sized pages, giving a third more matter.

The magazine has always been successful financially. Notwithstanding the various additions and the consequent increase in expense, the subscription price has remained the same, except

that ten cents was added for postage, when a change in postal laws required prepayment. During the three years that it was a quarterly it paid its own expenses and those of the entire Home Department. When it was made a monthly, for two years its expenditures were larger than its receipts; but since that time it has always paid expenses,—covering the salary of one who has charge of the subscription lists, and of the editor, who has also served as Home Secretary of the Board.

In 1870 the eight pages for children were struck off by themselves, forming a little periodical called *Echoes from Life and Light*, which had a good circulation. From 1876 to 1881 this matter, supplied by the Board, occupied one page of *The Well-Spring*, published by the Congregational Publishing Society. In 1881 *The Mission Dayspring* began to be issued jointly by the American Board and the Woman's Board, which still continues its monthly visits to nearly 13,000 subscribers.

Another useful department of missionary literature is comprised in the various leaflets published by the Board, containing useful hints as to methods of work, stimulus for the uninterested, and information as to the condition of women abroad and the work among them. Those leaflets issued by other Boards are also collected and kept ready to supply the demand, so far as possible. In this department we should mention also the thousands of weekly pledge en-

velopes, and miteboxes of various kinds sent out each year, and also the sets of costumes provided for children's meetings and entertainments. As these leaflets and boxes are mostly sold to those who desire them, this department also has not (except in one or two instances) been a tax upon the treasury of the Board, until the last two years, when it has seemed best to circulate them more without pay.

Aside from these, the collection and distribution of manuscript letters and papers, and the providing of speakers and material for meetings, has necessitated a department by itself, called the "Bureau of Exchange," which was started in 1876, with an efficient secretary at its head. Through its instrumentality from one to two thousand manuscipts are supplied each year to auxiliaries and mission circles, and missionary speakers provided for meetings of from one to two hundred. During the last year a monthly four-page leaflet on the topics suggested for meetings in *Life and Light* has been issued, and has met with marked approval.

The unwritten history of all these printed pages and manuscripts who can tell? We know of more than one who has been led to consecrate herself to missionary service abroad; of many whose interest has been kindled and kept alive; whose zeal has been stimulated; whose purse strings have been opened; whose prayers have been multiplied by a chance or systematic reading of the printed page.

TRAINING OF CHILDREN.

A third aim set before us at the beginning was the training of children to missionary interest. The little ones were early gathered into societies called mission circles, and their leaders have been most earnest in giving them thorough instruction, and most fertile in resources to hold their interest, and in helping them to raise their gifts for missions. The meetings of the Board for children, when they have come by the thousand with banners, and flowers, and songs, the rallies in the Branches, and the many little circle meetings, have been bright blossoms on the parent tree that sometimes seems old and worn. The gifts from these circles, amounting in some years to ten and twelve thousand dollars, have helped to build two Morning Stars, the Robert Logan and the Hiram Bingham, and have placed substantial school buildings in Africa, Turkey, India, China, and Micronesia, in additon to their regular donations for schools, scholarships, and Bible women. The patient toil of these little ones, their eagerness to earn their gifts, and their many little self-denials, offer an example that their elders might do well to follow. The children in our mission circles of twenty-five years ago are women now, and we find them among our best workers in the foreign field and in the home churches. This growing work among children and among young ladies necessitated a department especially for them, which was

started four years ago, which has proved invaluable, and giving the greatest hope for the future.

This, in meager outline, is the story of our work among the home churches for the quarter of a century just past. To fill it out in full detail in all its length and breadth and heighth and depth, in all its strength and beauty, would fill a volume. Perhaps we may be pardoned a few contrasts. Twenty-five years ago a majority of the officers of the American Board doubted our right to be. To-day they grant us their hearty confidence, and recognize us as a real power in their work. Then, pastors looked askance at us as we made our modest efforts to form Auxiliaries in their churches. Now, they ask our missionaries into pulpits in their Sunday services, and seek our members for their conferences and other gatherings. Then, we had not an organization of any kind connected with us. Now, we have twenty-three well organized Branches, comprising 1,700 local societies. Our first meeting numbered forty; since then—as in connection with the meeting of the American Board at Springfield—a single meeting has filled three churches. Twenty-five years ago the women who were accustomed to conducting public meetings could almost be counted on one's fingers; now, they can be numbered by the hundred. Then, we had not a dollar in our treasury, and rejoiced exceedingly over the little more than five thousand dollars received the first

year. Our receipts in 1892 were over $143,000, and we mean they shall never be less than that amount. Then, we gave much anxious thought to a few circulars; now, we issue regularly a woman's magazine with a circulation of 12,850; a children's paper with 13,000 subscribers; and leaflets by tens of thousands. Twenty-five years ago there was one Woman's Foreign Missionary Society besides our own; now there are forty-five, well equipped, and in smooth running order.

Has all this been *our* work? By no means. No body of women could arrogate to themselves a work like this, and least of all the quiet, unassuming Christian women who form the great body of our workers.

We are told that there was once a famous artist, whose father, living with him, had some skill in modeling clay. The father would work by the hour in the daytime with busy, although trembling and clumsy fingers, and often retired at night weary, doubtful, and discouraged. While he was asleep the son would take the misshapen clay and with deft fingers fill up the indentations here and there, smoothing the rough places, removing the unsightly excrescences, bringing out lines of strength and beauty and right proportions, making over the poor one-sided, blemished attempt into a fair and lovely form for the father's astonished eyes when he should awake. So it has been with our work. The Lord Jesus Christ, our great Master artist

has, we believe, been in and around our Board from the beginning, filling up our shortcomings, overruling our mistakes, smoothing the rough places, blessing our feeble, twisted efforts for the futherance of his kingdom. We believe that He means us to rejoice to-day over what He has helped us to do, that He enters into our gladness, enriching, ennobling, sanctifying everything that has been attempted in His name.